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# **LIFE IN THE PAST LANE**

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF WILLISVILLE  
BY JESSIE VANOVER BIRD**



**Published June, 1998  
By The Willisville Women's Organization**

This Booklet was donated to the  
Historical Society + Perry Co Jail  
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Good Reading!!

Flamine Schrader

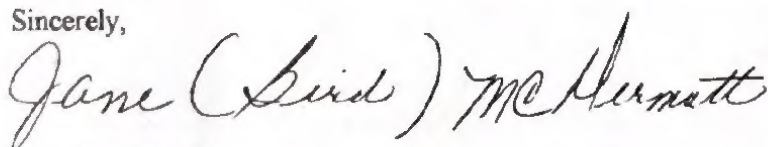
Dedicated to the loving memory of my brother, the late Earl Vanover. City Councilman  
1939-1942.

Note: This book was researched and written by Jessie Vanover Bird as a service to the community and to the Willisville Womens Organization. It was not written for financial gain to Jessie Vanover Bird or to her heirs. Sadly she passed away before the book was ready for publication. Any errors in the book were made in transcribing the notes and were not Jessie's. I Apologize for any significant errors and no offense was intended toward anyone.

I know that many people in the community provided information for this book, however I could not find a list of names. So please let me take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped make this book possible.

I hope the community enjoys this book as it was written after many hours of research and much time was spent by Jessie. She did it out of care and love for her community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jane (Bird) McDermott". The signature is fluid and elegant, with the first name "Jane" being the most prominent.

Jane (Bird) McDermott

c 1989 Jessie Vanover Bird or her heirs



In the beginning God Created.....created what? God created many things and among them was a small spot on this earth that centuries later would become Willisville, Illinois.

Hastening through the centuries, our imagination can see the first Americans. The American Indians roaming free and inhabiting this area. Historians suggest the possibility that Lewis and Clark might have been in Perry and Randolph County on one of their expeditions. Some historians believe Lewis and Clark visited a site south of Percy and Cutler and set up camp where the golf course and Scuttle Inn are now setting.

Even though history has ignored what was to become our town, it has been here all along in it's own insignificant way, becoming part of the world, the United States and the state of Illinois. Eventually this spot of land became part of Perry County.

Records indicate that the United States granted ownership of approximately forty acres of land to Anthony H. Lively in 1853. This land was part of what is now Willisville.

Similar grants and purchases were made by various people. Many of whom were to use these lands for the purpose of coal mining. In 1866 Anthony Lively leased his land and all mineral rights to Benjamin Niblock for the purpose of mining. Thus was the beginning of the coal mining boom. It wasn't until 1884 when D. P. "Dick Willis" sunk old mine (Number One) that the wheels were set in motion to form Willisville.

The Willis Coal Company began operation around 1884 and with it came the growth of the community. Willisville was just a coal mining settlement but it was to grow by leaps and bounds.

Many of the people who came to work in the mines were European immigrants. They had worked the coal mines in Sato, Illinois prior to coming to Willisville. They brought their families and even their dwellings with them.

The population was growing and it was time for the settlement of Willisville to become a full-fledged town.

On February 27, 1900, the male citizens (this was prior to the women's right to vote) met to vote on the incorporation of a city to be called Willisville. Fifty six men attended and the vote was carried, to incorporate Willisville.

On March 5, 1900, Willisville was incorporated by the state of Illinois. Certification of incorporation was received on October 10, 1901.

In 1900, the population was three hundred ninety. By 1910, the town grew by 171.8%. From 1910 to 1920 it grew by 37%. It reached it's peak in 1920 to a population of one thousand four hundred eighty five people.

It was the turn of the century, a new decade, a new year. The wheels of progress were set into motion. A new village was created from the little mining community in the southwest corner of Perry County.

As the United States has been called a "melting pot", so might Willisville be called a "mini-melting pot". Such European countries as Germany, Italy, Denmark, Russia, and England lent their sons and daughters to become part of this community.

In the 1900 census, John McLaughlin (census taker) recorded the names of these immigrants as well as the names of the first generation Americans who were descendants of the early pioneers.

Those of Italian and German descent outnumbered the other nationalities. But people from many different countries were to be the civic leaders and business men of this community. They all lent their talents to the prospering of this little mining town.



In 1901, J.P. Lakeman was elected as the town's first mayor. As in any city, large or small, there were issues to be dealt with and business to be taken care of. The village of Willisville had to deal with issues affecting its citizens. Over the years, Willisville has seen many town meetings. They have had to deal with a large spectrum of problems and issues. The problems facing this new town seem unrealistically simple compared to today's problems.

In January 1905, a town-like appearance began to take form. The village stood on wobbly legs but none the less it was standing.

In his sprawling hand-writing, clerk John Henderson records the following. January 1905--A fire company is to be organized and Alvin Bradley is to be appointed captain. Each man in the fire company is to get on dollar (\$1.00) when on duty.

--The pool room of Kulp (Culp) and Loftus is to be closed on Sundays.

-- The town hall is to be painted drab with white trimming.

--The town is to clean up all alleys and the town marshal is to collect a poll tax and a dog tax.

--All doors on public buildings are to open outward.

On May 10, 1907, a special meeting was called by the town board. It was for the purpose of taking up and considering all unfinished business. The clerk reports of having posted three notices to the public. This notice was to advise the residents of there being a case of diphtheria in the village and requesting all public gatherings be suspended until further notice.

At a regular meeting on July 1, 1907, Noah Carter was given authority to collect a "dog tax". He was also given authority to kill the dogs he was unable to collect a tax on and he was to be paid fifty cents for every dog killed and cremated.

Ordinance #23 was passed by the village board. There is no date given on this ordinance, however, it has to do with what was called "honey dipping", a slang term for privy cleaning. Ordinance #23 read as follows: "No person shall engage in, or pursue the occupation of a scavenger within the village limits without being specially licensed. Any person engaging in this occupation will pay two hundred dollar (\$200.00) per annum for such license.

Every vehicle used to convey any filth shall be fitted with a tight box. This box is to be constructed in such a fashion as to disallow any of its contents from escaping. No scavenger or other person shall remove the contents of any privy or other matter of like offensive character within the village at any other time than between the hours of 10:00 P.M. and 5:00 A.M. of the following day.

Distance Removed: All filth or offensive matter shall be taken at least 1/2 mile beyond the village limits, or to such places designated by the mayor.

This ordinance is funny to us today, but environmental issues were just as important to people in the early 1900's as they are to us today.

Chicago and Willisville are miles apart both by culture and geography, however, they did share one similarity, voter irregularity. On July 5, 1907, after looking over the ballots

of an election, one ballot was found that the voter had marked both yes and no on a proposition to purchase a grove to use as a cemetery. H.F. Schmidt presented an affidavit signed by Dominico Desarbo stating that Mr. Desarbo had voted contrary to his own wishes. No reason was given by Mr. Desarbo, as to why he had voted this way. A move was made by Charles Bradley and seconded by Fred Metz to count Mr. Desarbo's vote a yes.

On August 1, 1907, the village board considered the proposition of having granite sidewalks put in throughout the town. They voted to have the citizens of Willisville pay as much as they could possibly afford in order to have sidewalks in front of their property.

In these early days of Willisville, there were special meetings called for many reasons.

One special meeting was called to advise a committee of citizens, miners, board members and Italians on information given to Willisville in a telegram sent by the Illinois attorney general. The contents of the telegram are not revealed, but it is interesting to note it was sent to a "committee of citizens", "miners" and "Italians." since the attorney general wanted this telegram to include everyone he specifically referred to the Italians, as they were not United States citizens by birth or naturalization.

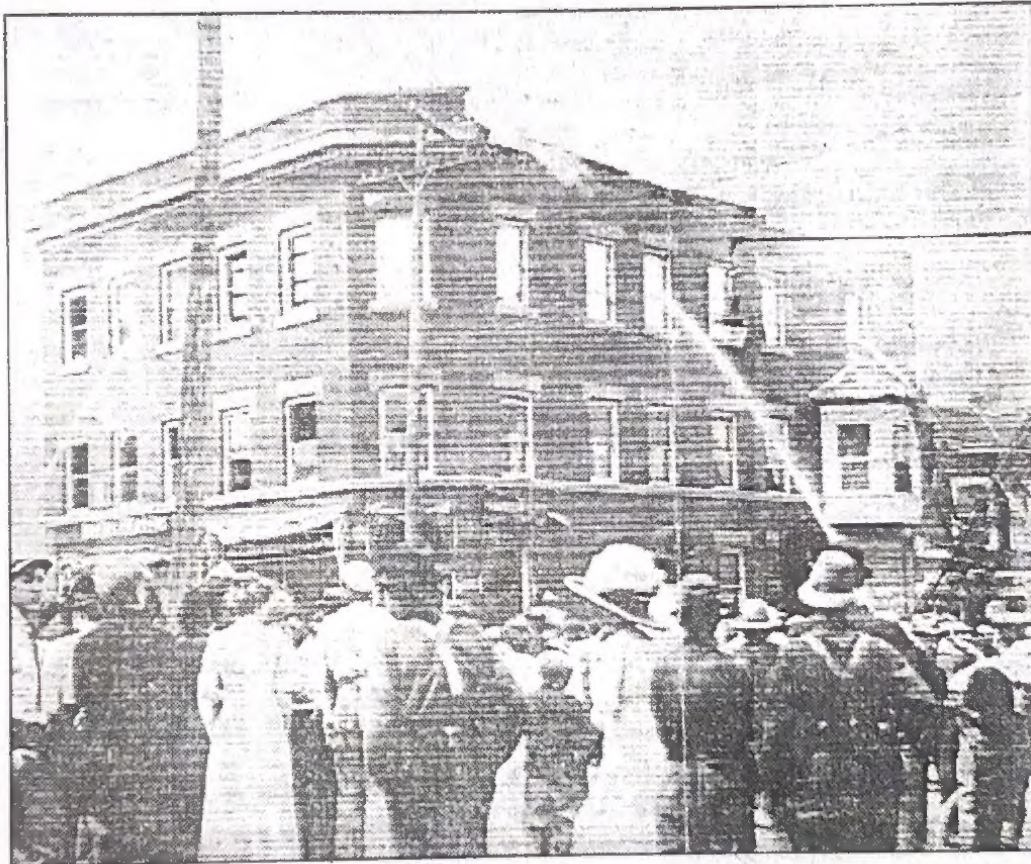
Through the years, Willisville has had many town meetings, but the issues dealt with in those early days were the most important issues ever to be dealt with. They were the foundation that Willisville was built on.

The following information was taken from a letter found by Carl Goetting when he purchased a house owned previously by Miss Malinda Williams. This letter was believed to be written in the 1930s by Miss Williams.

In the spring of 1889, Andy Soper and Jack Kerstene began sinking a coal shaft on what was then known as the Ben Soper farm. This farm was located in the extreme southwest corner of Perry county. The Soper farm was later sold to Robert Dukleman who sold it to Mr. William Glore.

The Soper-Kersten Coal Company met with many financial problems and work there was abandoned. Another company took over the mine and had the same disastrous results.





**Willisville residents turn out to watch the Tallo Hotel fire, circa 1910.**



In 1893, another company was formed which comprised of "Dickey" Willis, a Mr. Thompson, and Gus Blair. These men obtained a lease from Mr. Glore and resumed sinking the mine. This company also met with many set backs, but it continued to operate until they succeeded in getting capital investors, in 1895. The company was re-organized in 1895 under the name of the Willis Coal and Mining Company. E.J. Krause was president, and treasurer of the company. C.H. Krause was the vice president and general manager. H.H. Schroeder was secretary and Thomas Jeremiah was general superintendent.

In 1900, A Mr. Williams began sinking another coal shaft on the east side of town. In 1902, this mine was sold to the Missouri and Illinois Coal Company. With the launching of this new mine and the success of the Willis Coal Company, people began moving to Willisville.

With the success of the coal companies, Willisville grew rapidly and in 1894 the first store was erected by F. A Henson of Sato Illinois. Soon after opening his store Mr. Henson sold it to Blair and Lucier, A Murphysboro firm. Blair and Lucier operated the store for a short time and they sold it to Mr. G. A. Dempster of Ava, Illinois. Mr. Dempster's business flourished in the selling of groceries and general merchandise. He later added an undertaking business. J.M. McDonald was the funeral director and this business also did well.

Mr. Dempster sold the general merchandise store to William Heitman in 1918. The store burned to the ground, in 1923. Mr. Dempster also sold the undertaking business in 1918 to Mr. McDonald who was the funeral director. Mr. McDonald operated the funeral home until 1926. In 1926 his son took over the business.

In 1894 the merchants began a local branch of the Retail Merchants Association of Illinois. The organization grew and in 1920 it had the following members:

- T. J. Smith, General Merchandise
- A. Dempster, General Merchandise and Undertaking
- J. W. Valentine, Bakery- W. R. Hala, Manager
- Lyric Theater, Mrs. Bernell Miller, Music Instructor
- Willis Dairy Farms, Fred Wendell, Manager
- H. C. Behnken, General Merchandise
- John Tallo, Groceries
- Dr. F. W. Dains-Dentist
- Oscar Uhles-Barber
- Alvin Bradley-Post Master and Insurance
- Lewis Brothers-General merchandise
- J. J. Zimmers-Meat Market
- G. H. Teekleburg-Novelty Store
- John Lakeman-General Merchandise
- Willis Coal Company-Ice Plant
- E. A. Short-Restaurant
- Laney's Store-Homer Lane, Proprietor
- Joe Grego-Feed Store
- Murphysboro Telephone Company-Malinda Williams, Office Manage
- M. and O. Railroad Company- W. B. McMurtrie Agent and Operator

This organization was kept up until 1928. The businesses of the town deserve mentioning because of the courteous treatment and fair dealings these merchants gave to their customers. Their high business standards won the confidence and patronage of not only the town's people but also those living in the surrounding area.



## WILCO DAIRY BARN

While the operation of the Willis Coal Company was the reason for numerous businesses in Willisville, the Willis Coal Company not only mined coal, but also spread their wings into other areas of commerce. The most impressive of these business side-lines was the Wilco Dairy Barn. The people in the area simply referred to it as "The Dairy Barn". It was said the Dairy Barn was Wilco Coal Company's "Ego Trip".

The picturesque setting that surrounded the Dairy Barn was a sight to behold. The grounds were beautifully landscaped and flowers were planted all around the grounds. Oranges lilies that can be seen around town to this day, are said to be descendants of the Dairy Barn flowers. The Dairy Barn adorned the Northeast corner of Krause and Kingshighway and expanded northward and eastward. The main building was constructed of red tile.

The Dairy Barn was known throughout the United States and many foreign countries. It was said to be the largest operation of its kind in the United States and perhaps the largest in the world, according to some. Representatives from all over the United States and many European countries visited the Dairy Barn to examine its futuristic operation.

The main building was constructed of concrete tile. This housed the milk cows, office and the laboratory. This building also held the necessary utensils for handling the milk. There were eight silos that were used to store feed. They were constructed of concrete with steel enforcements. Less important buildings were simple frame structures that were used for chores essential to the dairy industry. One of these smaller buildings was the wash house. The dairy barn supplied white uniforms to its employees and they were laundered on the premises. If cleanliness is next to godliness then the Dairy Barn was a Godly place indeed. There were three shifts of employees who did nothing but scrub and clean.

# Willisville Sterilizing Plant

WILLISVILLE, ILLINOIS

o 90 Route  
Mr. *Ernest Behnke*

Month of *Dec.* 192*8*

1.	<i>57-7</i>	17.	
2.		18.	
3.		19.	
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15.		31.	
16.			

(SEE OTHER SIDE)

The following precaution is necessary for the production of Good, Heathful Milk on a Profitable to the Farmer.

FIRST. Immediately after milking, cool the milk down to sixty degrees, by either using coolers or placing the cans in cold water and stirring until cold. Putting the cans in cold water is not sufficient unless you stir the milk.

SECOND. Do not leave your cans in the stable while milking.

THIRD. Always rinse your cans out with cold water before placing milk in them.

FOURTH. Do not put the top of the cans on tight, in which you have milk. Leave them so the air can get through.

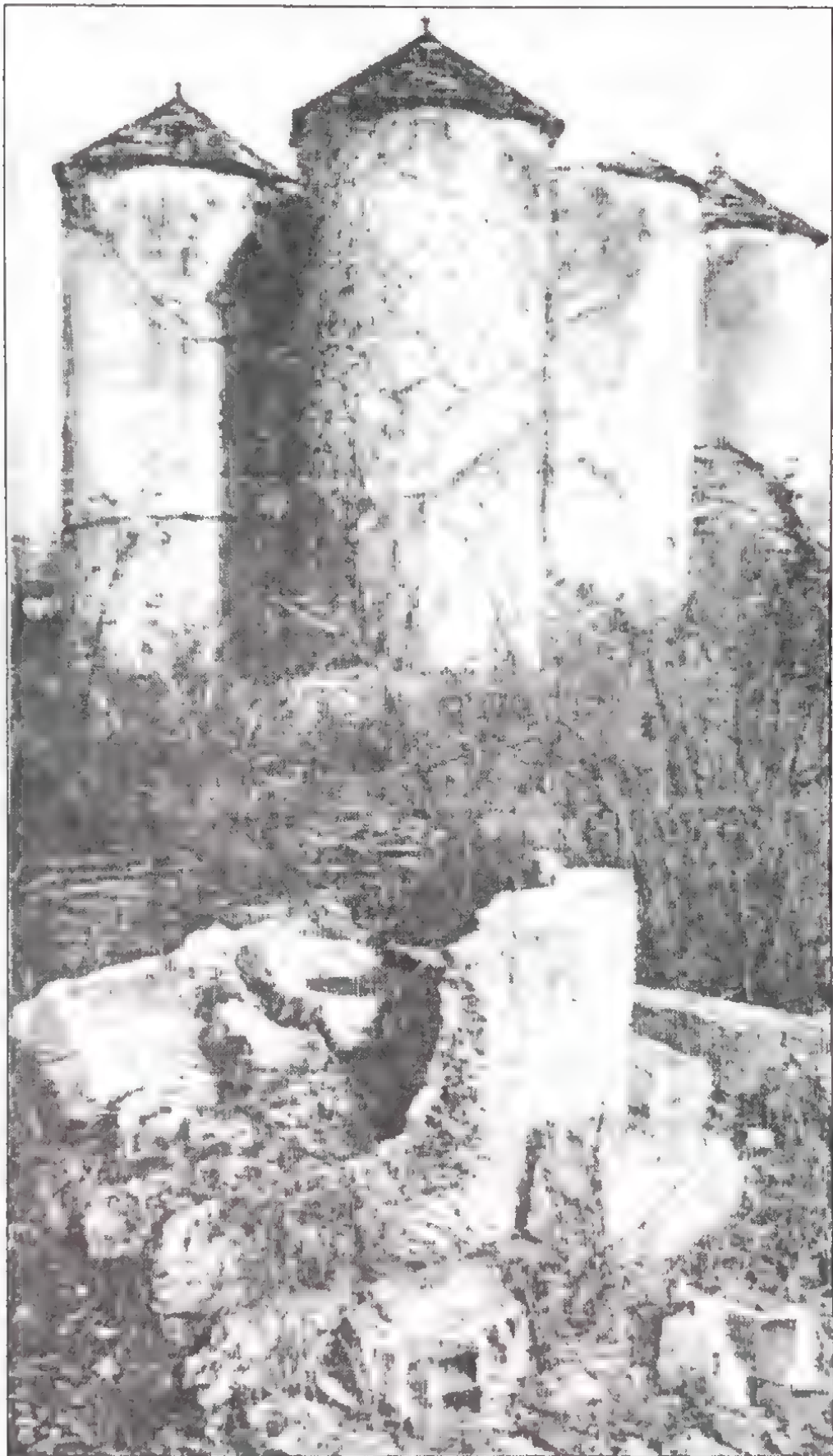
FIFTH. Always take the covers off the cans after receiving them from the factory, and let them air out, each and every day.

SIXTH. In pasture season keep cows out of pasture containing onions.

If you will follow these instructions, you will assist us greatly, and it will be profitable to you.

See that your cans are kept clean.  
Cool the milk within 20 minutes  
after it has been milked. Keep the  
night and morning milk separate.





**The abandoned Willisville dairy silos**

It was said you could eat off the floor. At all times there was a gentle flow of air circulating through out the building. This was accomplished by the use of turbine ventilators on the roof.

The care and comfort of the animals was the prime concern of the operation. Each cow wore an ear tag giving instructions as to the diet and care of that particular animal. A huge culvert was installed under the road. This culvert was used for driving cattle from the barn to the lush green pastures across the road. The use of the culvert kept the cattle from crossing the road and hindering the flow of traffic as well as a safety precaution for both cattle and man. Each cow had its own stall with a drinking fountain in it. When the cows were brought in from the pastures, they were led through water and then cleaned off before being milked.

In an interview given to Mrs. Pearl Lodge by Mr. Fred Hammel, Mr. Hammel states the cattle were Holstein and they were milked by both hand and machine. Cold water was run over the fresh milk to cool it quickly. The milk was then homogenized and put into a refrigerated freight car at night. The milk was sent to St. Louis each morning. Glass quart and pint bottles were used and the words Wilco Farms was embossed on the bottles.

The Hog Farm was the third segment of the Willis Coal Company's holdings. It was managed by a gentleman named Winfield Fults. It was located outside the city limits. It was on the east continuation of School Street. The part of the road where it was situated is now closed.

The dwelling was a huge frame structure and with care and attention, it could have resembled an old southern manor.

Other structures included, low-frame hog houses and a red tile building for attending to the hogs on an individual basis. It had other buildings as were common to homes of that day.

The hog pens had concrete floors and were washed down often. The waste was stored in a cistern and was eventually used for fertilizer. The operation was kept as sanitary as could be expected in an operation such as caring and raising hogs.

The hogs numbered from eight hundred to one thousand, and were Red Du Roc stock. They were sold to breeders desiring through-bred hogs. Many of the hogs were shipped to the city to be slaughtered.

The days the hogs were shipped was a fun day for the children of the town. The hogs were driven through the streets to the stockade in much the same way as were the cattle. The children would delight in seeing the animals being rushed along the street and would mimic the animals sounds and movements.

The company purchased one particular hog at the price of five thousand dollars. He was to be used as a breeder hog. The Lady Hogs found this expensive specimen attractive, but the breeder hogs masculinity ended with his only flirting with the Lady Hogs. He had been purchased at an exorbitant price for one specific purpose, however, he could not fulfill this purpose. Alas, poor hog was never to become a family man. Much to the Company's chagrin he was destined to become pork chops rather than to continue his family lineage.



## BANK

The rapidly developing community and the accelerating prosperity generated by The Company's \$50,000.00 semi-monthly pay roll necessitated the services of a financial establishment.

The First National Bank of Willisville was founded circa 1917 and served as a thriving financial institution for about ten years. Yes, Willisville was a boom town in the truest sense. But the boom was quickly turning to bust.

In 1922 there was a mine strike. It lasted about six months. As finances dwindled in all areas, it became apparent that The Company, the town and the bank would not recover their former financial status. This strike precipitated the town's downward trend.

Coupling this with the impending conditions preceding the depression, there no longer remained a need for a bank. As the success of The Willis Coal Company had in effect been the precursor of the bank, the set of circumstances surrounding The Company at this point was a major factor in bringing about the bank's dissolution.

The First National Bank of Willisville closed its door the final time, March 23, 1927. The capital stock at that time was \$25,000.00.

For the period preceding the closure the President was Clyde Cheatham, Vice President W.B. McMurtrie, Cashier H.A. Edler, Assistant cashier T.J. Smith. The directors were Clyde Cheatham, W.B. McMurtrie, Dr. F.W. Dains, R.W. Stewart and H.S. Knaur.

All of the afore mentioned persons were stockholders, holding various shares of stock ranging from five shares to twenty six shares.

Clyde Cheatham left The First National Bank of Willisville to become a cashier at The State Bank of Ava. Later after finishing things up there, T.J. Smith joined Clyde Cheatham at Ava, to also become a cashier there.

T.J. Smith's move completed the banking operation in Willisville. The Willisville Bank Building was vacated. Everything pertaining to the banking business was loaded in the back seat of a car and moved to the State Bank of Ava. This was combined with the operation of the State Bank of Ava, thus creating a new bank.

The new bank comprised of the two former banks became known as The First National Bank of Ava and is presently operating under the charter of the old First National Bank of Willisville.

The bank building stood vacant for a number of years. During the depression it was used to dispense government commodities. Later Sally Benson used the building to operate a restaurant. In the 1940's the Catholic Ladies Solidarity Society met there, and occasionally held bake sales. At a later date, Theodore Bradley acquired the building and used it as a book depository. In later years the building was renovated by Ed Lodge. He changed the shape of the roof and plastered the outside. The building presently looks reminiscent of something one might see in Mexico or Spain.

It is interesting to note, a Willisville resident is presently a director at the First National Bank of Ava. Without his generous, good natured help, this part of our history might not have been written. Thanks Bob.....Robert L. Baker.

The information showing the figures and the demise of the Willisville Bank were supplied by Mr John Edgar President of the Ava Bank It is interesting to note that, the Ava Bank is operating under the Charter of the old Willisville Bank



NOTE.—To avoid discrepancies and unnecessary correspondence, the totals of Resources  
No. 213 PLEASE FOLD THIS SIDE OUT

PLEASE FOLD THIS SIDE OUT

REPORT of condition of "The First National Bank" at Williamsville  
Reserve District No. 1  
in the State of Illinois at the close of business on March 23rd, 1927

RESOURCES		Debit	Credit
1. a Loans and discounts, including advances, credits of other banks and foreign bills of exchange or drafts sold with endorsement of the bank (except those shown in Item 1-b).	105426.58		
b Acceptances of other banks discounted, including those not endorsed reported in Item 1-a.	none		
Total loans		105426.58	
2. Overdrafts, secured, \$ 100.00, unsecured, \$ 100.00			none
3. U. S. Government Securities owned (see note 1 on margin)			
a Deposited in secure circulation (U. S. Bonds—par value)	8250.00		
b All other U. S. Government Securities (including premiums, if any)			
Total Government Securities			8250.00
4. Other bonds, stocks, securities, etc., owned			91739.40
5. a Cashier's checks covered by deposits accepted by the bank, not by other banks for account of the bank and not otherwise.	750.00		
b Liability of foreign banks and bankers for drafts and bills accepted by this bank to cover drafts exchange and other outstanding	none		
6. Banking houses, \$ 475.00; furniture and fixtures, \$ 3000.00			7250.00
7. Real estate owned other than banking house			none
8. Legal reserve with Federal Reserve Bank			7541.68
9. Items with Federal Reserve Bank in process of collection			none
10. Cash in vault and amount due from National Banks (see schedule No. 3)			16665.75
11. Amount due from State banks, bankers, and trust companies in the U. S. (other than included in Items 5, 8, and 10)			none
12. Exchange for clearing house			none
13. Checks on other banks in the same city or town as reporting bank (other than Item 12)			none
Totals of Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13		16665.75	
14. a Checks and drafts on bank, including Federal Reserve Bank, issued outside of city or town of reporting bank	108.78		
b Miscellaneous cash items			108.78
15. Redemption fund with U. S. Treasurer and due from U. S. Treasurer			none
16. U. S. Government Securities borrowed (see Item 4)			none
17. Bonds and securities, other than United States, borrowed (see Item 4)			none
18. Other assets, if any (this amount must agree with total of schedule No. 1 below)			none
TOTAL		123722.11	

(MAKE NO ENTRIES HERE—SEE SCHEDULE No. 1 BELOW)

Place for officer and to be signed by officer before it has been acknowledged. See Act February 25, 1917. Signature must not be an officer or director of the bank.

State of Illinois  
County of Perry  
I, H. A. Keller, Cashier  
do hereby certify that I am not an officer or a director of this bank.

NOTE.—This report must be sworn to by the President or Cashier of the bank, and forwarded to the Commissioner of the Department of Finance, State of Illinois, and forwarded to the Commissioner of the Department of Finance, State of Illinois, and forwarded to the Commissioner of the Department of Finance, State of Illinois.

(THE FOLLOWING SCHEDULES, AND THE SCHEDULES ON THE CARD IN TABLE AND AMOUNT DUE FROM NATIONAL BANKS)

a Gold coin	165.00
b Silver and minor coin	691.62
c United States and bank currency	6550.00
Total cash	7406.62
d Amount due from National Banks	9459.13
Grand total (must agree with Item 10)	16665.75

(6) NOTES AND BILLS REDISCOUNTED.

REDEMPTIONS

a With National Banks	
b With State Banks and Trust Companies	
c With Federal Reserve Bank	
d Other than with banks	
e With War Finance Corporation	
Total redemptions (this amount must agree with Item 10 of Schedule No. 1)	

## SCHOOLS

The first school was situated on the corner of School and Laub Street. It is believed that the first teacher was a Mr. Barrows. Basic reading, writing and arithmetic were taught there. The building was used as a school and then as a dwelling. In 1930 it was used as an auto repair shop by the late Henry J. Heine. The building was razed in 1940 as a residence was built on the site. The residence still remains on the old school site.

The Blythe park school was a simple frame building, it was white and it was located where the ball diamond now sets on park street. The usual subjects were taught there. The building was purchased in the mid 1930's by Mr. Bill Bowers of Ava and he used the materials from the old school to build a building in Ava.

The Little White School was built on School Street where the home of Wib and Angie Alms now sets. It was a frame building painted white. It faced south. Two large doors opened to a foyer that doubled as a cloak room. There were two large classrooms and the rooms were heated by two old fashioned pot-bellied stoves. The first two or three grades were taught there, (depending on the size of the classes and the financial situation at the given time.) Classes ceased being held there in the mid 1930's. Shortly thereafter it was used as a library. It was then used as a Pentecostal church before it became the site of a hot lunch program sponsored by the WPA in 1939. In the late 1950's classes were again held there for a short time. The building was last used by the late George Wilson as an auto repair shop. It then sat idle for a short while and was finally torn down.

The Old Brick School was the largest school building in Willisville. It was situated where the Meadow Brook apartments are now setting. It was a two story brick building with a belfry on the roof. I am sure there are many people in Willisville who can still remember the sounds coming from the belfry early in the morning. Telling students that school was about to start and they had better hurry.

The first floor housed the first thru seventh grades. The office was also on the first floor. The eighth grade and 3 years of high school were held on the second floor. The students had to attend their senior year in other towns. Some finished school in Pinckneyville and other surrounding areas.

In the late 1950's the lower grades attended classes in the basement, the middle grades were on the first floor and the seventh and eighth grade classes were held in one classroom on the second floor.

The gymnasium was built in 1938. It was not attached to the school. It was situated north east of the school building. It was built mostly with local labor and it was a WPA project. The building was covered with white shingles and the inside featured polished hard wood floors. The bleachers were on the north side of the building. The south side of the gym contained a stage where maroon velvet curtains were used to open and close the stage area.

There is a tragedy associated with the building of the Gym. Late in the afternoon on a bright fall day the gym was completed. Mr. Henry Brandhorst who was a carpenter on the project and Mr. Earl Vanover, who was project bookkeeper, were looking over the completed work. Mr. Brandhorst noticed that a corner of the protective wire covering near an east window had not been nailed down properly. Mr. Brandhorst climbed a ladder and nailed the covering down. As he was descending the ladder he fell. Mr. Vanover ran



to where Mr Brandhorst had fallen and saw that his injuries were severe. He summoned help and Mr Brandhorst was taken to the hospital in Murphysboro where he later died.

A ceremony to dedicate the gym had been planned. People associated with the gym project felt that Mr. Brandhorst would have liked for the dedication to still be held. Chairs were placed in a semicircle on the stage. School board members and other local dignitaries were seated in the chairs during the ceremony. But one chair sat empty with a black drape across it. That would have been Mr. Brandhorst's chair.

December 18, 1957 saw the end of the use of the Old Brick School. It was an unusually warm day for December but no one complained. It was 60 degrees. Quite warm weather to have a week before Christmas. The children in the upper grades were in the gym practicing for the Christmas program. It was nearly time for school to be dismissed and finishing touches were being added to the practice. Most of the students were sitting in the bleachers when it started to hail and the wind started blowing. The windows of the gym started to break and glass started flying down on the bleachers. Mr. Rayburn White who was a teacher at the school yelled for all the students to hit the floor. Everyone knew something very bad was going on outside but they didn't know what it was. After what seemed like hours but was in fact only a few minutes all the commotion outside subsided. The children were lined up to be dismissed when it was discovered that a tornado had hit Willisville and destroyed the school building. The gym where the students were, sustained some damage but nothing near the magnitude of the destruction of the Old Brick School. The upper story of the school had been caved in. If any of the seventh or eighth graders who occupied the upper story had been in their class rooms there probably would have resulted in serious injury or death to many of these students. There were younger children inside the school during the tornado but their classes were held in the basement and they were all safe due to the protection of being in the basement.

The school was damaged beyond repair and students in Willisville were bused to Percy to attend school while a new school was being erected.



**The Willisville School after it was hit by the 1957 tornado.**



**A close-up view of the damage done by the tornado.**



Following the tornado of 1957 a new brick school was built. The building is now apartments. But it was built on the site of where the old school stood. It was a modern two story brick building. Classes from first to eighth grade were held and later just the lower grades attended school there and the upper grades attended classes at the Junior High that was built at the Trico High School location.

Aside from the public school system, Willisville has had one parochial school and two christian schools.

In the early years of Willisville there was a catholic school held at the present site of where the Catholic parish hall now sets. The classes were held by a parish priest by the name of Father Senessee. He is believed to have been the founder of the school. Other classes were taught by the nuns, however not too much information is available on this particular school.

Tri County Christian Academy was an appendage of the Tri County Baptist Church. It was located south of Willisville where the church is located. The Rev. Bill Brown was the minister of the church and founder of the school.

Faith Christian School is situated in the basement of the Missionary Baptist Church. Its founder is Gene Brown.

## THE MODERN WATER WORKS SYSTEM

It was early fall 1940 For the first time every family in town was afforded the opportunity to have running water, via the means of a modern water works system

There had been running water in the town before, but on an exceedingly limited basis

The first running water was provided by The Company Very early in the history of the village, a deep well was dug in the vicinity of the Old Mine to accommodate their own needs A few houses located close by were permitted to receive water from this well, as were the three saloons, and the residences of The Company's Personnel

During the period immediately preceding the installation of the modern system; there had been a citizen-controlled system This system was antiquated and could not supply the entire community. Some questioned its purity

Federal Programs which became effective under Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt enabled the town to procure the modern water works system. The programs were the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, known as the R.F.C. and the Works Projects Administration, known as the W.P.A

The first recorded discussion of the modern water works system was at a meeting of the board of trustees in November, 1933. Shortly thereafter Anderson C. (Andy) Lodge journeyed to Chicago, expenses were paid by the town, to seek information pursuant to the proper course of action required by the board in order for the town to become eligible for Federal Assistance Apparently, nothing developed from Andy's efforts as the water works is not mentioned again until some time later.

Subsequent mayors and their respective councilmen grappled with the concept of a modern water works system and lent their energies and talents towards advancing that acquisition

It was under the mayoralty of Nick F. Du Vardo and his councilmen, Earl Vanover, Joe Busciglio, Howard Repke, Henry Heine, Roy Mathis and George Kessel, that the modern water works system finally became a reality.

Symbolically speaking, the frustrations, the hassles, and discouragements, encountered by the various mayors and their councilmen, were all washed away with the installation of the water works. Oooooooh . Not quite! It was at this junction that the proverbial stuff was about to hit the fan

Unpredicted expenses put the town in the position of not having sufficient funds to meet their obligations. They were threatened with a law suit.

Meanwhile John D. Carter had been elected mayor At the request of Mayor Carter Earl Vanover traveled to Chicago at his own expense to act as the liaison for the village, and to confer with the proper persons on matters relevant to the indebtedness of the village

Earl spent approximately five months in Chicago He was invited to share quarters with his brother Tom Vanover who was a permanent resident of the City. Earl worked for the Lady Esther Cosmetic company, to provide for his personal expenses and the minimal expenses as were incurred by him on behalf of the town How much Earl accomplished or failed to accomplish is a moot question at this late date



How the town dealt with its indebtedness is probably known only by Our Father in Heaven. The threatened law suit never materialized. It is known however after the installation of the modern water works system there was never anything but a temporary interruption in the service and water supply.

The minute book(s) which could clarify this seem to be lost. Unfortunately this is the same book(s) containing the minutes of meetings presided over by Mayors Kenneth Lodge and Orval Knop, and Mayor Wilbert Alms with his many years of tenure.

## MINE STRIKE

It was 1922 Willisville's Glory-Days were soon to be a thing of the past. The miners declared a strike. What caused this strike is unknown. The miners may have been justified in striking, but the reason either just or unjust had an adverse effect on the community.

The miners were out for six months. Those six months introduced the town to many negative aspects. Many of these negative aspects are still with us today.

Six months of unemployment gave rise to a meager flow of money. The bustling economy of Willisville came to a screeching halt. Many people were forced to go elsewhere to earn a living. Many of the miners had lovely homes that were paid for or that had sizable equities in them. They were forced to sell. But there was no one to buy them. Everyone felt the effects of the strike. Many homes and businesses were lost to fires of suspicion origin. Some of these fires were acts of arson, set by those who stood to profit by collecting insurance money. There was never any legal action taken or arson charges made since it could not be proven that the fires were set deliberately. But, it was generally accepted by the towns people that these fires were arson.

With the numerous fires in town, it became nearly impossible for homeowners to get their property insured, what insurance was given, was on a very limited basis.

Many people sold their homes and these houses were moved to nearby towns. Many of the nicer homes in Steeleville, Ava and elsewhere are houses that once sat in Willisville. The burning and selling of homes deprived Willisville of some of its most attractive buildings.

In 1932 the singular most important thing that has ever happened to Willisville came to pass. The Willis Coal Company failed. The Dairy Barn ceased operations. The Hog Farm and other lands and facilities of the Willis Coal company were leased to individuals who tried to squeeze out a living. Then the Depression hit.

Memories of the depression are both bone chilling and heart warming. Bone chilling in the sense that everything, including simple food and minimal medical care were difficult to find. It was heart warming in the sense that christian charity was abundantly available. Everyone pitched in and tried to help each other. They especially tried to help those who were less fortunate than themselves. Sometimes it was difficult to determine who the less fortunate were. Everyone seemed to be in the same predicament. A few people were fortunate enough to have employment, but by and large there was not much work for anyone.

In August of 1932, Robert Hornbostle, a young boy age 9 or 10 was a central figure in an event reminiscent of Paul Revere's Ride. Robert ran through town hurriedly announcing to those he met, that free flour was being given away at the bank building. The flour give-away was probably the first public evidence of any kind of public assistance, or Relief, as it was commonly called.

Relief orders became available. Persons and families in need were issued slips of paper by those in charge of public assistance. These slips of paper entitled people to be given a certain amount of groceries. The amount of groceries that people received was determined by the size of their families.



In the spring of 1933 people in the area were made aware of another form of help. The C C C 's was a government organization that took young men and gave them work on various government projects. These were usually in areas of conservation and forestry. Five young men from Willisville signed up and three of them were accepted. The families of these young men were sent twenty five dollars a month and the young men were given five dollars a month.

In the latter part of 1933 and the early days of 1934 another work program came to be. There was a program called C W A , followed by the P W A and finally the most familiar and most endearing was the W P A.

During the years that followed the W P A worked on many projects. Laborers did road work and worked at a rock quarry near Chester, IL. A Community center was started. The community center featured a play school for children ages 4 thru 6. Children were treated to a story hour and crafts and tap dancing lessons were given. Box suppers and contests were also held at the center. Adult ladies formed a club that met there.

People helping each other was never more evident than in the story about two women during the depression. Two ladies confided in each other. One did not have any flour and the other confided she didn't have any potatoes. The one without flour had many potatoes and the one without potatoes had a lot of flour. The ladies solved the problem by doing some old fashion horse trading. They traded flour for potatoes and potatoes for flour.

The hardships of the depression are stamped indelibly on the minds of people who lived through it, so are the fond memories also stamped on their minds. Bob Grah, a former Willisville resident gave me an account of some of his fond memories during this time.

#### END OF THE COMPANY

February 8, 1934 brought the complete and absolute demise of the Willis Coal Company. On that date a deed was executed to Illinois Southern Coal of Indiana by representatives of the Willis Coal Company.

In the spring of 1937 the demise of the Willis Coal Company and the hardships of the depression loomed over the heads of the people of Willisville. Low spirits and a ho-hum attitude seemed to prevail.

The spirits were soon lifted when word came down that one of Willisville's own was suddenly a rich man. August (Gus) Campanella and his brother Ben were joint winners of the Irish Sweepstakes.

While I won't give the amount won, suffice it to say as the people of the town said, "It was enough money to burn a wet mule."

Good fortune had truly smiled on the Campanella brothers and the town rejoiced in their good luck. Spirits were lifted and by virtue of the brothers winning the sweepstakes Willisville made the front pages of every major newspaper in the country.

## THE SOUP KITCHEN

In response to a plea for help in collecting information for this book, Bob Grah was kind enough to make two long distance telephone calls to contribute his in-put and to reminisce. Bob was born and reared here. He is the son of the late Harry and the late Flora Grah.

One of Bob's more cherished memories seemed to be that of the "Soup Kitchen", the term applied by the school children to the little white school where a WPA sponsored hot lunch was in effect.

The ole' salivary glands were really stressed in remembering some of those delicious stick-to-the ribs meals. White beans prepared with a ham bone, a slice of sweet onion, cole slaw and corn bread. Home made soup and bran muffins. Stewed tomatoes with macaroni and always a simple dessert, which little twelve year old Carl Goetting called "pursurp" for the amusement of the big girls. The "pursurp" was usually a fruit flavored gelatin or canned fruit. Simple but nourishing fare.

Bob recalled the vegetable garden, also a WPA project, which supplied most of the food served at the Soup Kitchen. The garden project was situated at what had earlier been the site of the dairy barn operation. Except for breaking the ground in the spring the gardening was all done with hand implements. A portion of the dairy barn building was used as a cannery. Usually those working the garden and the cannery in the spring and summer were the same local persons who worked at the Soup Kitchen during the school term.

Some of the ladies employed at the garden were very nice looking. The story is told of one wife who became unduly concerned about having her husband working in close proximity to these attractive lady employees. The wife not being fluent in the usage of American English is said to have commented that those lady workers were just working out in that garden to show their "hasses".

Bob recalled the late Collie Vanover, an older friend from Bob's early youth. Collie, in the manner of speaking was Willisville's answer to the Pied Piper of Hamelin (Germany). Not that Collie ever ran any rats out of Willisville, but in the sense that he had a following of children. Little Boys of which Bob was One.

When the water works system was installed it became Collie's duty to light the lamps (smudge pots) and to place them in the streets at potentially dangerous places created by all of the digging. Collie would leave his home for his appointed rounds at six each evening. As he passed various homes, the little boys from that home would join him in his trek across town. This was not prearranged on Collie's part. All little boys were welcome, with the provision that they behave and look after the younger ones in the group. If they promised to be very careful, each boy was permitted to strike a match, which Collie would use to light a lamp. This was Collie's way of teaching them the proper respect for fire.

Collie cherished those memories and often spoke of Bobby's using the term "Mr. Collie", when addressing him.

## CHURCHES

While an unsavory picture of Willisville has been vividly portrayed, there was a genteel society evolving. While there were beer halls and murders in the town, these by no means represented the majority of Willisville's citizens. Most townspeople all pulled together for the common good of the community. Churches, schools and civic groups were organized with their precepts being put to practice. As heirs of the christian tradition, priority was given to organizing churches.

The Freewill Baptist, the Missionary Baptist and the Catholic church were the first churches in the community. The Freewill Baptist, later called the Central Baptist Church, began holding services as early as 1899, possibly earlier. The first worshipers held services upstairs over the Old Mines Store building which was located on the west side of Broadway. The Glad Tidings church now sets on the location of the Old Mine Store.

Lots were donated by Henry Rosendahl as well as 400 dollars to build the first Freewill Baptist church. A white frame building was constructed and the first services in the new building were held on October 14, 1899. The vestibule and the belfry were added in 1906. Later a twelve foot extension was added to the church as well as electric lights.

In 1917 the church was destroyed by a tornado. It was replaced on the same site. The church was built of brick and remains on its present site today. The brick church was completed in 1921. In 1921 the Freewill Baptist Church formally adopted the name Central Baptist, and since has remained known by that name. The Missionary Baptist church was said to have been part of the Central Baptist Church at one time, however, there is no proof that this was the case.



## OLD STRUCTURES

While remains of the old Dairy Barn looms in ruin and the old bank building still stands, most of the older structures that were once part of Willisville's bustling economy have long since disappeared.

The oldest structure in Willisville, that still remains and is used today, is the home of Edward "Dink", and Beulah Wendell. This had its beginnings as a log cabin and later it was covered with siding. It was originally a farm house and was on its present site before Willisville became a town. The coal mining industry and the town developed around the house.

According to Beulah, an elderly man would walk past the house, years ago and always stop and look at it. He told Beulah that he had been born in the house and that the house had belonged to his grandfather. The elderly gentleman's name was thought to be Soper.

Apparently some people believed the Wendell's house was haunted. It seems that at various times a thumping could be heard inside the house from no apparent source. Upon doing some repair work one day, Beulah discovered the "Haunt". The noise was caused when pieces of mortar that held the logs together would fall and then roll a few feet, thus causing the thumping noise.

One other old structure remains and is still in use today. This is part of the house occupied by Dorothy Jaimet Kelly. The area of the house that serves as the living room today, is constructed of logs. It originally served as a stable for mine mules.

## SUBURBS

As the hen spreads her wings to cover her chicks, so does Willisville spread her wings to cover her chicks. Her chicks are Dolly Hill, the Sticks and Puxico. These areas are part of Willisville in every aspect but the legal aspect. That is to say they are not incorporated areas of Willisville therefore those who live in the area are not permitted to vote on anything that affects the city of Willisville proper.

Dolly Hill is the closest to town of these areas. In fact you would not know when you were leaving Willisville and entering into Dolly Hill. It is located south of the corporation line of Willisville. There are at least three different versions as to how this area got its name. The first version of this story, is that it was named after one of the early land owners in the area, a Mr. Henry Rosendohl. Some believe that the name was taken from the last syllable of Mr. Rosendohl's name. Others have related a story in which it was named after a Mr. Crawford who owned the property where the Bill Huffhine residence is now located. It was said that Mr. Crawford's wife was the former Dolly Bradley and that the area was named after her.

The late Mr. Noah Dameron had the most interesting version. He maintained that all the ladies who lived in that particular area were as pretty as dolls, thus the area became known as Dolly Hill, where all the pretty dolls lived.

According to the late Tessie Vanover the area was "picture Book pretty". When the area was first built up, all the houses were new and very well maintained.

An interesting sight in Dolly Hill is a well that sets near the road in front of Dr. Bob and Beverly Smith's house. Many have wondered why a well would be put so close to the road. The truth is the well wasn't put close to the road, the road was put close to the well. At one time all the area where the road and houses are now, was pasture land. Before the road was built, the well sat in the middle of Mr. Ed Russell's farm.

Puxico is another of Willisville's suburbs. It is located north east of town. The late Collie Vanover said the first families to live in that area were Italian Immigrants who worked the land with hand implements. It is said that the area was named after Puxico, Mo. home of Dick Willis who was owner of the Willis Coal Company.

The last of the three suburbs is known as the Sticks. Not too much information is given about this area, however the late Mary Jane Jarret said that was where the town of Willisville began.

## THE LYNCHING

Correctly defined Willisville was not a frontier town, but as particulars of her formation began to unfold it was comparable to a frontier town

The town experienced a period of decadence. Every sin known to mankind found a breeding place in Willisville. Many negative influences were seen by the up-right citizens. Willisville found itself bequeathed with a pile of horse dung from yesteryear.

One person was excluded from Church for using swear words in public. This person was "cussin up a storm" on one of the main sidewalks. When looking back one can see that the "Cusser" was a saint compared to what was to follow.

A double monument in the I.O.O.F. Cemetery at Percy marks two graves. The people in these graves were victims of the Mafia. This information was written by Ezra Cooper brother of one of the victims. The victims were Bill Cooper and his friend Andy Adams.

It was an evening in Mid-October 1914 that the Mafia made its presence known in Willisville. Willisville had earned itself a hard name for its gambling, drinking and fighting. But none of this had been fatal until this time.

An element existed within the Italian segment of the community that was strictly "Hush Hush". Several prominent persons in the community were invited to go for a walk, from which they never returned.

At one time three bodies were found in one week. Some bodies were placed on the railroad tracks just beyond a curve. The bodies were mangled. Some were mangled beyond recognition. One body was found on an empty car siding. This body had stab wounds and facial mutilations. These killings always were within the Italian community. When Italians were questioned about these murders no one would ever talk.

The reason for this secrecy was not known until Andy Adams and Harry Keller ruffed up a bunch of Italians in an Italian bar. Shortly after the ruffing up incident, Andy Adams received a letter signed with a black hand print. While the Mafia thrived in most major cities, no one in rural areas knew anything about the syndicate or organized crime. This was soon to change.

Andy Adams told Ezra Cooper, he knew who was doing the killings. Adams suspected two brothers named Sam and Albert of these murders. Sam & Albert were both well dressed men about town. They spent money freely but had no visible means of support. Andy was correct in his suspicions of Sam and Albert. They were "Hit Men", but this information cost him his life.

Bill Cooper and Andy Adams were walking down main street one evening. A man stepped from the darkness and asked Andy if he had any cigarette papers. Andy recognized the man as being Sam one of the brothers. Andy told Sam that he did not have any cigarette papers. Andy suspected something was wrong, but before he could do anything, shooting broke out. Albert was hiding in the darkness and had started shooting at Andy. Bill Cooper tried to defend himself and his friend, and he too was shot. Even though he was wounded, Bill held onto Albert until the authorities came. When the shooting had stopped Sam was lying on the ground dead. Bill was holding onto Albert and Andy Cooper had disappeared. Andy was later found and both he and his friend Bill



were taken to the Murphysboro hospital, both died there later on. Andy lived 24 hours and Bill lived fifty two hours.

The Murphysboro newspaper was quoted as saying that Willisville was a bloody thumb print on Perry County.

The violence had not ended with Sam's being killed and Andy and Bill on their death beds. The worst was yet to come; more persons would become involved.

Acting in his official capacity, it was Marshall Henry Beisner's duty to escort Albert to Pinckneyville, to be handed over to the officials there. In order for Marshall Beisner to perform his duty properly, he must first transport Albert to Percy, and then catch a train to Pinckneyville.

The marshal deputized two men to assist him, his son Ed Beisner and his son-in-law Charles Peebles. As officers of the law they were armed.

A rig (surrey) was rented from Joe McDonald's Livery Staple to carry Albert, Marshall Beisner and the deputies to Percy. The surrey was driven by McDonald's son, Lyman (called Blackie). Blackie carried a shot gun.

A certain route was always followed when taking prisoners to Percy. This time they took a different route. They went down the dirt road, (later to become the highway). They came to a spot close to where the old Misslehorn house now sets, they turned left into a lane known as Burling Trail. About three quarters of a mile into Burling Trail they crossed the county line and were then in Randolph County. In Randolph County they were overtaken by twelve men bearing arms, mostly shot guns.

A young man of sixteen, armed with a rifle, fired the shot that killed Albert. Albert's body was riddled with shots. The body is said to have had a hundred bullet wounds in it.

This having happened in Randolph County, caused authorities of that county to step in. Deputy Ed Beisner was taken into custody and was jailed at Chester, for not giving proper protection to his prisoner. Ed Beisner was soon released and nothing appears against his name.

From that day forward the names of the participants of this one and only lynching has never become public knowledge. And so it was the tragic drama of the bloody thumb print on Perry County, had its finale in Randolph County. This brought an end to the killings and was the final curtain to that reprehensible period of our history.

The Adams/Cooper and Albert/Sam incident was the last of the killings, there was another "would be" murder which never came to pass. The long arm of the Mafia reached the village once more.

The site of this violence was in the city park. A shot was fired at a man named Shoemaker Fararah. Fararah was shot in the neck, but he survived his wound. The perpetrators fled the scene. The authorities were called, and the sheriff found the culprits hiding under a bed in a nearby house.

Shoemaker Fararah recovered from his wound and refused to press charges against those who shot him. Shoemaker knew about the Mafia and the Mafia connection.

NOTE: This information was supplied to me by Mr. Rex Franklin.

## ITALIANS

During the time of this violence in the community, the Italians were at the forefront, both as perpetrators as well as victims. Much of the misunderstanding between the Italians and the rest of the population stemmed around the notion that the Italians had sticky fingers. They were accused of stealing things.

In the early days of Willisville a story was handed down that bears repeating. Farmers and their families would come to town to do their trading. After the farmer finished his business, he would go to the tavern and have a beer. His wife and children would go into the ice cream parlor. While the farmer and his family were away from their wagon, things they had just purchased began to disappear. However if the farmer stayed with his wagon or had someone watch it for him while he was away, his supplies were always accounted for.

A local law officer, claimed it was the Italians doing the stealing. He was over zealous in his efforts to catch the Italians. He claimed he was watching the wagons and saw Italians stealing things and running away. He was never quite able to catch the thief nor was he ever certain as to which Italian it was, who had stolen.

The people of the town became suspicious. There was never any proof of who was stealing. The law officer always said the thief was an Italian but could not identify him. It was then that the truth surfaced. Upon questioning the law officer, it was found out, that the officer himself was doing the stealing and blaming it on the Italians.

Many of the Italians who came over to America had lived in poverty and adverse conditions. The necessity for food outweighed their moral values and stealing in their former country became a necessity. Young children had been taught to steal. They did not view this as an immoral act, it was a means of providing much needed food and other things for their families. They brought this notion with them when they came to America. Being aware of this, made it easy for someone to accuse the Italians of having "Sticky Fingers" even when they were not stealing. When the Italians learned that America was a land of plenty and when Italians and non-Italians alike learned to communicate better the "Sticky Finger" syndrome dissipated.

Innocent Italians from respected families lived in a perpetual state of fear. This fear was from both the Mafia and from Non-Italians. respectable Italians were found murdered.

One such incident had its inception in the vicinity of where Julia Mehlville now resides. An Italian gentleman and his wife were sitting on their front porch one evening in 1914. They noticed two men approaching their house. The man and his wife went inside to avoid these men. The two men came upon the porch and knocked on the door. No one answered. The men continued their knocking. The man of the house reluctantly opened the door. The two men seized him and took him away. The man who had been taken was found dead on the railroad tracks. The wife of the murdered man was questioned by authorities but gave no clues. Shortly thereafter, the lady left town and was never heard from again. A man by the name of Frank Heine was said to have been an eyewitness to this incident.

A Mr. Costa was excessively fearful of what his fate may be. Mr. Costa ran a local butcher shop. In the evening when he closed his shop, he would walk straight home. He would go inside and bolt his door and pull down the window shades. He opened his door for no one but Mr. Adolph Schmidt. It did not matter who came to his door or what they wanted. Mr. Costa refused to answer his door unless Mr. Adolph Schmidt was with them. Anyone who wanted to speak to Mr. Costa at his home had to get Adolph Schmidt to accompany them. Mr. Schmidt would go with people to Mr. Costa's house and knock on the door and identify himself. Mr. Costa upon recognizing Mr. Schmidt's voice would come to the door. Mr. Schmidt would tell Mr. Costa who was with him and what that person wanted. Mr. Costa would then open the door. If Mr. Schmidt was not present, Mr. Costa opened his door to no one, no matter what the reason for the visit.

NOTE: Mr. Schmidt referred to in this passage, is Mr. Adolph Schmidt, father of Raymond (Butch) Schmidt.

And so it was, the tragic drama of the Bloody thumb print of Perry County was coming to an end. What was the reason for the murders and disappearances? No one knows for sure. Some said it was racial, the Italians against the Non Italians. But this has never been proved.

Peace was once more restored to the village of Willisville. Murders, disappearances and lynchings were a thing of the past. What brought on this peace? Some give credit to another organization for restoring law and order to Willisville. It was not the duly appointed law officials, nor did the Mafia restore order, No, it was another organization. An organization as zealous for law and order as the law officials and accused of having methods that were as expedient and as violent as the Mafia. This organization was the Ku Klux Klan. Otherwise known as K.K.K.

The Reverend Laurence Bird and Mr. Ira Jarrett both told of the intervention of the K. K. K. to restore law and order to the community. Neither man was a member of that organization.

With communication and transportation being what they were, administering justice was a cumbersome and time consuming procedure for the law enforcement officials. One bad deed begat another one, before the officials could get a grip on the first one. By contrast, the K.K.K. performed decisively. They quickly executed solutions and eliminated spin off problems.

There is no positive evidence that there was a K. K. K. in the Willisville area, but stories passed down gives some credence to the possibility of such an organizations.



## BOOT LEGGUN

It was 1920, The roaring twenties as the decade was called. The rip roaring twenties might have been a more apt description, as to the way conditions of that decade affected Willisville.

The first rip of the roar was the effect the enactment of the eighteenth amendment (prohibition) had on the community.

As a consequence of a flagrant disregard for the Federal Law "boot-leggun' joints" (boot legging joints) became common place in the village. These illegal establishments merely replaced the former legal saloons. Nothing much had changed except the way the law makers viewed the sale of liquor.

Beer (called home brew), soda pop, and whiskey were available for the customers, with beer served on the premises being the beverage of choice. Whiskey was mostly a carryout commodity, to be passed around at barn dances and other gatherings, where a "snort" might be deemed to be in order and likely as not to be passed around, secretively at gatherings where liquor definitely was not in order. Other forms of liquor were usually made in the homes for family consumption.

The first establishments were opened for the convenience and enjoyment of the miners and others desiring a "cold one". Women were largely not a part of this scene. It was the males' domain. Once in a while a man and his wife or girl friend might drop by for a drink. On these rare occasions the women were treated with utmost respect. Women as regular customers were discouraged, as were those who were unattended by male escorts.

With the impending depression and the onset of the depression, the operation of one of these places proved to be the most lucrative way for some men to provide for their families. The plain unvarnished truth is, there was the distinct possibility that some of these families could have gone hungry without the income from this illegal activity. Some persons who were law abiding citizens in all other areas became proprietors of boot legging joints.

A great deal of tolerance was exhibited by the general public. A "live and let live" attitude prevailed. Those implicated in the activity were the epitome of discretion; all involved desired to keep the proprietors out of jail.

Drunkenness and disorderly conduct was an occasional annoyance. Violence was minimal. However, the death of one man, is believed to have been a murder, committed at one of these places. Generally there were no huge problems, even though the sensitivity of some were offended by the stimulus.

A certain faction of the citizenry seemed to derive a vicious kind of pleasure, when endowed with information for the authorities, and informing (snitching) became a way of settling petty vendettas. Others simply believed that the law should be upheld and seized the opportunity to inform as a means of enabling the authorities to enforce the law.

Word of an impending raid would reach the village ahead of those who were going to conduct the raid. At those times bootleggers would hide their inventory in a place that was not on their own property. Sometimes they would empty it in the ditches and then wash the bottles. Thus eliminating the incriminating evidence. During a successful raid

the authorities would pour the liquor in the ditches. The ditches were used by the criminal and the authorities alike, in order to get rid of the illegal booze

When a raid was in process, people would line the streets and revel in the excitement. The smell of liquor permeated the air. There didn't seem to be any stigma attached to being arrested for selling illegal booze. It was just the way it was. But being turned in by a nosy neighbor was hard on the bootleggers ego. Some of the more popular gentlemen of the town were afforded the hospitality of the county jail in Pinckneyville for selling illegal liquor.

## THE PARK

On December 2, 1907, H F Schmidt presents a petition asking the board to buy the park at a cost of \$800 00 This property was to be paid for in monthly installments of \$200 00 Moved by Kramer and seconded by Schmidt the petition was rejected on roll call The vote stood as follows, Kramer and Schmidt yes, Metz and Bradley no, since the vote was a tie the president of the board voted , no A move was made by Metz and seconded by Bradley to buy the grove On roll call the vote stood as follows, Kramer and Schmidt , no, Metz and Bradley, yes Again the vote was a tie and the president broke the tie by voting, yes This was the beginning of the park

A stroll through the park with your favorite guy or gal                    ahhhh how sweet it was Gazing skyward at the tall oaks.                    wondering what secrets they beheld Wishing they could speak                    and at the same time glad they couldn't The city park was the beginning of many a young romance Beautiful music came wafting through the air from the park. Local musicians and stars from radio station KMOX often performed in the park in the evenings Pretty young girls could be seen gliding across the dance floor with their favorite young man. What a way to show off their new summer frocks....

Young men could be seen carrying newly won Teddy Bears and Cupie Dolls, looking for some sweet girl to give it to and impress her with their skills at carnival games Little Mary Virginia Brownfield could be seen sharing her free ride tickets with the other children, while other little girls were sneaking past Ira Jarret, trying to get onto the dance floor for free and more often than not getting caught Local musician Charlie Todaro could be seen championing the little girls cause and the end result was, Little Girls Got In Free

Not all events at the park were fun and games. There were political speeches in the park and such dignitaries as U S Senator Kent Keller drew a large crowd in 1932.

The most wonderful memories of the park were not the political speeches or the sight of a dignitary The best part of being in the park, was seeing Edward Carl Goetting catch the greased pig, or the wonderful aroma of hot dogs and hamburgers being cooked . A generous slice of watermelon could be bought for .05 from Henry Luthy These were the days when the park was the center of social activity in Willisville.

There were revival meetings held in the park. The ministers ranged from quiet and eloquent to "Hell Fire and Brimstone" but it was just one more aspect of the diverse uses that the park supplied to the citizens of Willisville.

We owe these joyful memories to the town board and to Mayor Tom Jeremiah for having the foresight to see the wonderful activities that the park could supply



## FREE MOVIES

The city park was the center of most of the social activities in town during the early years of Willisville, but there were other attractions as well for the community to enjoy.

One of the most popular activities was the Free Movies. The Free Movies were held in what was referred to as the Bull Pen. If one stretched their imagination enough, the Bull Pen could have been considered an open air theater. It certainly was open and there was plenty of air, as they were held outdoors.

The seats were boards stretched across concrete blocks. The first movie shown was called "Hot Off the Presses". It featured an obscure actor with Slap Maxwell characteristics. While the movie was not critically acclaimed, no one in Willisville complained. The price was right even if the movie wasn't and Oscar Nominee. The movies were sponsored by the business men of the Willisville. There were many free movies held in the Bull Pen during the summer of 1936.

Movies continued to be shown until 1942. During the years, however, people were charged a dime. In cold weather the movies were held upstairs in a building that was situated across from the Brick Church.

## LEGENDS LIES AND OTHERWISE

**CALLING MR. BRADLEY.....** In the summer of 1943 not many houses in town were equipped with telephones. It was a common practice for the people of the town to use the pay phone in Nick Duvardo's store. As a courtesy to the people in town, Mr. Duvardo would accept incoming messages for people in town. He would then see that the message was delivered to the proper person. One day a girl who was employed by Mr. Duvardo took a phone message for Mr. Bradley. The caller simply said, "I have a message for Mr. Bradley." Mr. Bradley indeed! There were at least nine Mr. Bradley's. The caller didn't specify if he wanted Alvin, Calvin, Freeman, Ross, George, Matt, Bill, Ernest or Roy. It was a pretty tall order to get the message to the right Mr. Bradley. The problem was handled in a simple and expedient manner. Each Mr. Bradley was given the message.

Several men were sitting in front of John Bradley's tin shop one bright morning when a passer by approached and said "Hi John," and then he had to add another "Hi John, and then another "Hi John was added. The passer by said three more "Hi John's before he was finished with his greetings. It seems there were six men named John sitting on the front of the tin shop. Sitting in front of the tin shop were the "John's" Bradley, Trucano, Bradley, Glass, Bradley and Duvardo.

A story has been handed down about Willisville's "Madam". Those who referred to her simply as the "Madam" were just being polite. She was called by other names much less polite. Why was she referred to in this way? Well, to paraphrase an old saying, "There was a light shining in her window every night. "A red light." The world's oldest

profession was not her only profession. Her original enterprise, a house of "Ill Repute," led to another profession. Suffice it to say that she practiced surgery without benefit of a medical degree. She also ran an adoption agency. If one of her girls had an unexpected turn of events, the "Madam" would accept the baby for a price from the girl. She would then sell the infant to a couple who wanted a child. If one of her employees was not agreeable to this plan, the "Madam" had an alternative solution to the problem. She would then practice her third profession. However her employee had to pay her for services as a surgeon. It was a secret that everyone knew about. One day the authorities had to acknowledge what was going on. A fetus had been dumped into Curve Pond and floated to the top. There were no charges brought against the "Madam", since no one would come forward and give the authorities any information. It was however, a titillating topic of conversation at quilting parties. This was alleged to have taken place in 1914 but it was still discussed in town as late as 1942 at the quilting parties.

A story has come down from years ago about a young fellow who took his girlfriend to the local picnic. The girl remarked to her boyfriend, "Um, that popcorn smells good." The boyfriend responded by saying, "It sure does. Let's move closer to it so we can smell it better."

A gentleman in the early years of Willisville was very proud of his driving record. He had few if any auto accidents. He didn't need to take a defensive driving course to maintain his record of safety. He would simply stick his head out the window of his car and yell, "Get out of my way you S.O.B., can't you see I'm coming."

As a young bride Jessie Bird was said to have baked a cake that "Blowed up" in her oven, however after many years of refining her culinary talents her only cooking tragedy was setting fire to spaghetti she was cooking.

When pant dresses were the latest fashion rage, rumor has it that Billie Gower came to town with both of her legs in one leg of her pant dress.

When "Hot Pants" were in style, one of Rollie Stoffel's co-workers was reported to have asked Rollie, "What do you think of the fashion of women wearing 'Hot Pants'?" Rollie was said to have answered, "That's nothing new, women had hot pants when I was younger."

When the Ava Bank took over the charter of the Willisville Bank, the whole banking operation was moved to Ava in the back of a car.

There were those who reported seeing the late Paul Vanover narrowly getting missed by an oncoming vehicle as he stepped from the curb leaving the Post Office. The vehicle was reported to have been a motorized wheelchair.

As I said these are legends, lies and otherwise, time has taken its toll on the accuracy of these stories, and the truth lies dormant somewhere between fact and fiction. Embellishments have surfaced to lace the facts with fiction. There may be a lot of truth in these stories or just a spark of truth to them. But nonetheless these are stories that are all part of the history of Willisville. The reader can decide for himself, which is fact and which is fiction.



## THE TEA PARTY

While the free movie and the park afforded entertainment to the majority of Willisville inhabitants, there was another form of recreation enjoyed by a select few. Even though the participants were few their lack of numbers in no way dampened their "Spirits". These entertainment forms were known as the "tea parties".

The tea parties gained some notoriety in the early years of Willisville, a group of Oh-So-Good Church going Ladies always held their tea parties at one certain ladies house. An air of intrigue surrounded these meetings. No one was ever added to the group and no one ever left.

During the parties, neighbors could hear excited voices and laughter. After the parties the ladies were seen to exhibit a frivolous gaiety. Occasionally a fight would take place. These disturbances usually blew over quickly, however, it is a matter of public record that two of the guest were charged with disturbing the peace.

The mystery of the tea parties was finally solved, when word got out that this "Cream of Society" was not having tea. They were having beer. The hostess of the party had easy access to the saloon and could quietly slip out of her house and get the beer and quietly return home without being noticed.

**NOTE** The term Oh-So-Good Church Going Ladies was used to describe the type of ladies these were. It was not meant to be an insult. These ladies were not representative of any one church but attended various churches.

When people think of what makes a town, they generally think of buildings, streets, businesses and industry, but what really makes a town is the people. Willisville has had many colorful people in its town. Not celebrities on a nationwide scale, but people who were rich in character and humor. Willisville may have had a reputation for being a wild town during its heyday and some of the stories handed down substantiate these claims, but one could never accuse Willisville of being stagnant. Without the bootleggers and the reputed Mafia ties Willisville was unique by virtue of its people. Ordinary people in the eyes of many but they each had their own special characteristics that set them apart from ordinary people. Not the least of these special characteristics was a sense of humor unequaled anywhere in the United States. For example where could you find a town that gave its inhabitants the nicknames you are about to read. Some of the nicknames were spin-offs from the person's given name but others and indeed most, of the names came from people who had a most unique sense of humor.

Here Goes .....

Do any of you remember,,,,,,

Possum Baker (Walter)

Hawk Shaw Culp (Clarence)

Bones Carter (John)

Shag and Mag Miller (George & Margaret)

Shakespear Taggaret  
Jay Bird White (Rayburn)  
Tea Kettle (Noah Dameran)  
Banjo Culp (Andrew Sr.)  
Steam Boat Bill Hornbostle (Bill)  
Tooter (Alma Hager Rednour)  
Woody (Woodrow) Gall  
Gross Mama (Erna Culp)  
Dink Wendell (Edward)  
Popcorn Dolce (Joe)  
Little Iodine (Ruth Miller Patterson)

These people were not given these nick names out of disrespect nor were they insulting the recipients. They simply were names that stuck to these people and the people with these nicknames didn't consider it to be an insult. Well. There may have been one or two who weren't fond of their names. But the majority didn't seem to object. Why were these names given to these people. The only answer one could give, is, an irrepressible sense of humor that the people of Willisville were blessed with.

It is said that humor is its best when it is unintentional. This notion could certainly apply to a letter that the late Tessie Vanover wrote to her daughter Jessie in 1954

Dear Jessie.

I will write you a few lines today. We have had winter weather since you were last here. Some excitement too. Two mad dogs just took the town. Bit forty one other dogs in Paul and Tom's neighborhood, that they know of. Everybody here has their dogs tied up. Some have killed them. Nick Culp's store burned down. Everything he had burned to the ground, because there was not enough water. Can you get cranberries? If so, could you bring some. I can't get any since Nick's fire. I guess you read in the paper all about the fire. Everybody felt sorry for Nick, but nothing could be done. Paul was in a car wreck but he was not hurt. His truck and a car hit at the four way stop. Well there is no news, so I will close.

Love Mother.

Car wrecks mad dogs and a major fire didn't seem to constitute news to Mrs. Tessie Vanover.

Another example of this sense of humor took place in 1928. Women had been given the right to vote in 1920 but there weren't many who made themselves available to be voted for. At least not in Willisville. But in 1928 things were about to change. There were four ladies who did not like some of the things that were taking place in the city hall.

They secretly decided to take matters into their own hands. They decided to run for the offices of village trustees. It was a big joke around town. Women running for public office, Ha! Ha! But the last laugh was on those who thought it was a joke for women to hold public office. At the close of election day in 1928, Willisville had four new village trustees. All four of them were women. Clerk Edward Goetting recorded in his minutes the names of four ladies elected to the offices of village trustees. They were Miss Malinda Williams, Mrs. Bertha Bradley, Mrs. Amanda Dahl and Mrs. Mary Heine. So it was that ladies as public figures first wielded their influence in Willisville.

No history of a town would be complete without mentioning one of its most admired and influential citizens. While Willisville can boast of being blessed with many good people who helped to shape the town and to make it last almost 100 years from its beginning. There has to be one outstanding citizen who was at the heart of the growth and who was selfless in his pursuit of the betterment of the community. That person has to be, without question, Mayor Tom Jeremiah.

Some have suggested that Mr. Jeremiah was the first mayor of Willisville, however, he was not the first mayor, but he certainly was the first mayor to give purpose to the town and to lead her from her elementary stages and help her become a thriving community.

It was said that, the direction that Mayor Jeremiah took was the direction that the town took. There have been a profusion of stories and legends passed down about the mayor, most of them have been lost to time. Records indicate that the town never advanced as steadfastly or as efficiently as it did when Mayor Jeremiah was at the helm.

It was a sad day to all people of Willisville when their beloved mayor passed away. Mayor Jeremiah was truly destined to live in the memories and the hearts of the people of Willisville.

While the Willis Company gave birth to the village of Willisville, its failure did not mean the death of the town. It is true that after the decline of the Willis Coal Company, the town's growth and economic well being were sharply lessened, but the town endured. If the endurance of a town was based simply on economic factors, Willisville would have been long gone. But it was the people who endured. True, the Willis Coal Company brought the people, but it was the people who made the town last.

The population of Willisville was comprised of strong people who left their homelands and suffered untold hardships in search of a better life. The population was made up of those, whose families had been in this country from the beginning of the settlement of America. But these people all had one thing in common, the ability to work hard and endure life's hardships.

The demise of the Willisville Coal Company dealt Willisville an economic blow, from which it never fully recovered, but it endured. The Great Depression left the people scarred but nonetheless intact. The town gave many of its sons to fight in two world wars. Many who never returned to their homes and many who came back and were forever changed both physically and mentally. But the town endured.



This book is by no means a complete history of the town nor was it intended to be. This book was written so people can look at their town and see what it once was, and when they see what it once was, maybe it will be an inspiration to see more than a quiet, sleepy little town. Maybe they can see what still can be a bright future for Willisville based on the endurance of the people of the past.

## **WILLISVILLE WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION**

### **1998 MEMBERS**

**Josie Angeleri  
Grace Bogenpohl  
Donna Campanella  
Mary Dolce  
Kathryn Griffiths  
Janet Gower  
Marlene Hensley  
Blanche Henson  
Ruth Jeremiah  
Evelyn Mathis  
Bertie McNutt  
Marie Peeler  
Avonell Salger  
Cheryl Salger  
Romalee Stout  
Ruth Throop  
Vivian Throop**





